



Article

# Silencing of *Kv1.5* Gene Inhibits Proliferation and Induces Apoptosis of Osteosarcoma Cells

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**Abstract:** Kv1.5 (also known as KCNA5) is a protein encoded by the *KCNA5* gene, which belongs to the voltage-gated potassium channel, shaker-related subfamily. Recently, a number of studies have suggested that Kv1.5 is overexpressed in numerous cancers and plays crucial roles in cancer development. However, until now, the expression and functions of Kv1.5 in osteosarcoma are still unclear. To characterize the potential biological functions of Kv1.5 in osteosarcoma, herein, we examined the expression levels of Kv1.5 in osteosarcoma cells and tissues using quantitative real-time polymerase chain reaction (qRT-PCR), western blot, and immunohistochemistry assays. Four short hairpin RNAs (shRNAs) targeting Kv1.5 were designed and homologous recombination technology was used to construct pGeneSil-Kv1.5 vectors. In addition, the vectors were transfected into osteosarcoma MG63 cells and Kv1.5 mRNA level was measured by qRT-PCR and the Kv1.5 protein level was examined by western blot. We also examined the effects of Kv1.5 silencing on proliferation, cell cycle and apoptosis of the osteosarcoma cells using CCK-8, colony formation, flow cytometry and terminal deoxynucleotidyl transferase dUTP nick end labeling (TUNEL) assays. Our results showed that Kv1.5 was aberrantly expressed in osteosarcoma and that the synthesized shRNA targeting Kv1.5 reduced Kv1.5 mRNA and protein expression effectively. Silencing Kv1.5 expression in the osteosarcoma cells significantly inhibited the proliferation of osteosarcoma cells, induced cell cycle arrest at G0/G1 phase, and induced cell apoptosis through up-regulation of p21, p27, Bax, Bcl-XL and caspase-3 and down-regulation of cyclins A, cyclins D1, cyclins E, Bcl-2 and Bik. In summary, our results indicate that Kv1.5 silencing could suppress osteosarcoma progression through multiple signaling pathways and suggest that Kv1.5 may be a novel target for osteosarcoma therapeutics.

**Keywords:** Kv1.5 potassium channel; osteosarcoma; cell proliferation; cell cycle; apoptosis; signaling pathway

## 1. Introduction

Osteosarcoma, originating in bone, is the most commonly encountered primary sarcoma, which accounts for 60% of total malignant childhood bone tumors [1]. Osteosarcoma mostly occurs in adolescents; however, there is also an incidence peak in older people, e.g., in their seventh and eighth decades [2]. Osteosarcoma is a very aggressive cancer which left untreated is universally fatal. For osteosarcoma patients with no metastasis, the 5-year survival rate has been improved to 60%–70%

due to the modern multimodal treatments that combine chemotherapy, surgery, and sometimes radiotherapy [2–4]. However, 40%–50% patients will eventually develop metastases that are difficult to treat and confer a poor prognosis. Thus, there is an essential need to improve treatments, prognosis, and elucidate the basic biology of osteosarcoma. Recently, a profound genetic instability was found to induce aberrant expression of several gene products, which is associated with osteosarcoma [5]. These genes might be potential targets for osteosarcoma treatment.

The role of voltage-gated potassium (Kv) channels in cell proliferation and progression has been mostly explored in the regulation of cell membrane potential and excitability in neurons and other cell types, but a growing pool of evidence has demonstrated that Kv channels also significantly contribute to cancer development [6–8]. Among the Kv channel subunits, Kv1.5 is of particular interest because it has been found to play critical roles in proliferation of several kinds of cancer cells and its expression has been documented during neoplastic growth [8,9]. The tight relationship between Kv1.5 expression and cancer indicates that Kv1.5 regulation may be useful as pharmacological tools in anticancer therapies [9]. However, the correlation between the expression level of aberrant Kv1.5 and cancer development is still under debate. There are opposing conclusions concerning the relationship between Kv1.5 levels and tumorigenesis in several human cancers [10–12]. In addition, the expression and function of Kv1.5 in osteosarcoma are far from clear. So, experimental research is urgently needed to characterize the biological functions of Kv1.5 in cancer, especially in osteosarcoma.

To this end, we measured the expression levels of Kv1.5 in osteosarcoma using western blot, qRT-PCR and immunohistochemistry assays. Then, we characterized the effects of Kv1.5 silencing on osteosarcoma cell proliferation, cell cycle, and apoptosis. We also examined the activity of cyclin-dependent kinase (cdk) inhibitors and the Bcl-2 dependent apoptosis pathway. The results of our study indicated that Kv1.5 mRNA and protein were aberrantly expressed in osteosarcoma and it regulated osteosarcoma cell proliferation, cell cycle and apoptosis. Furthermore, our data suggest that Kv1.5 may regulate multiple signaling pathways to modulate cell cycle arrest and apoptosis.

## 2. Results

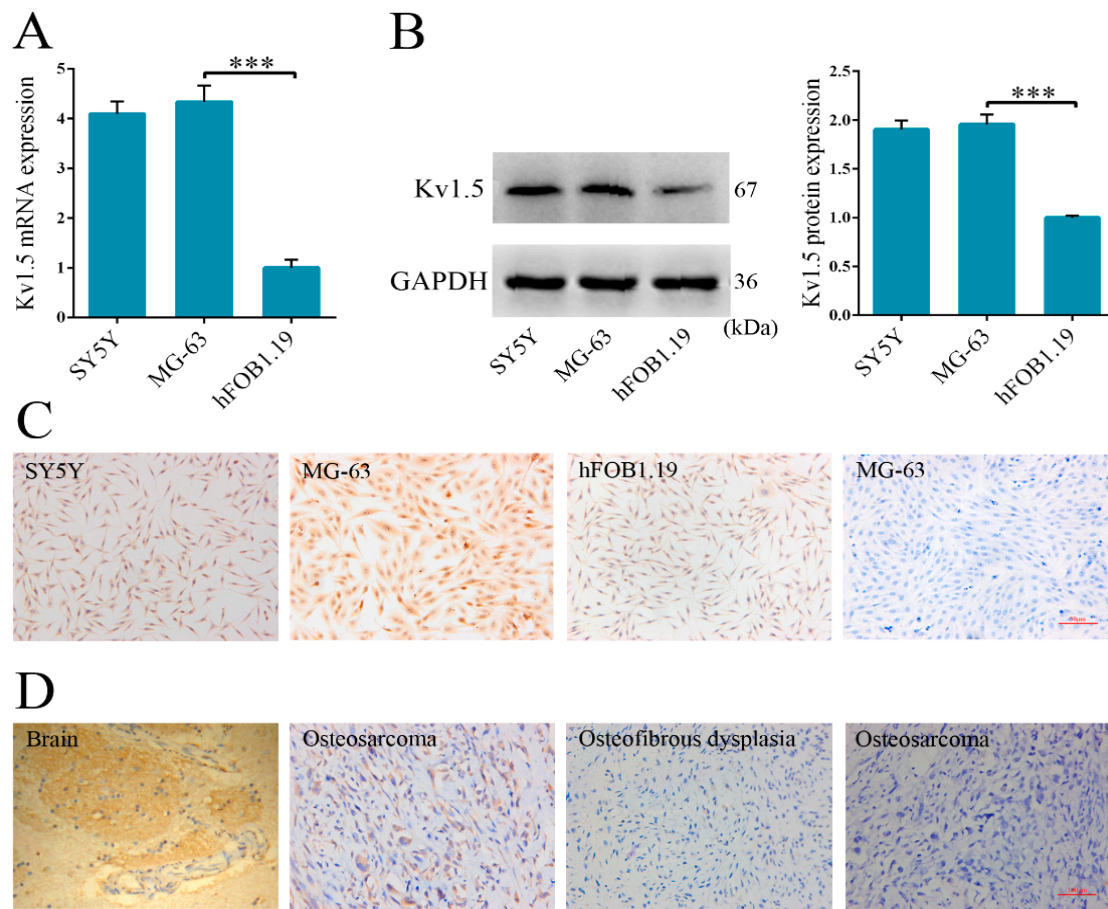
### 2.1. Kv1.5 Expression in Osteosarcoma

Human neuroblastoma cell line SH-SY5Y was used as a positive control in qRT-PCR, western blot and immunohistochemistry analyses [13]. As shown in Figure 1A, the transcripts of Kv1.5 were detected in osteosarcoma MG-63 cells. The western blot and immunohistochemistry results further confirmed the aberrant expression of Kv1.5 protein in MG-63 cells (Figure 1B,C). The expression of Kv1.5 in osteosarcoma tissues was then detected using immunohistochemistry with healthy human brain as positive control [10]. The results showed that positive Kv1.5 staining was detected in 15/23 (65.21%) osteosarcoma tissues and negative expression was found in six cases of osteosarcoma tissues. Representative staining results of Kv1.5 in normal human brain, osteosarcoma and osteosarcoma tissues are shown in Figure 1D. These results indicated that Kv1.5 was aberrantly expressed in osteosarcoma cells and tissues.

### 2.2. The Efficiency of Kv1.5 shRNA Transfection

The plasmids named pGeneSil-Kv1.5-1, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-3, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-4 and pGeneSil-control were identified firstly and the results confirmed that these five plasmids were constructed successfully (Figure 2A). Then, the transfection efficiency of plasmids was analyzed using fluorescence microscopy. A representative result of enhanced green fluorescent protein (EGFP) positive cells is shown in Figure 2B. Based on the EGFP expression in MG-63 cells, the transfection rate was confirmed to be 60%–70%. Then the effects of pGeneSil-Kv1.5 plasmids on the expression of Kv1.5 mRNA and protein in MG-63 cells were determined by qRT-PCR and western blot analysis. The results showed that the pGeneSil-Kv1.5-1, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-3 and pGeneSil-Kv1.5-4

all reduced the expression of Kv1.5, and that the inhibitory effect of pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2 was more evident (Figure 2C,D).



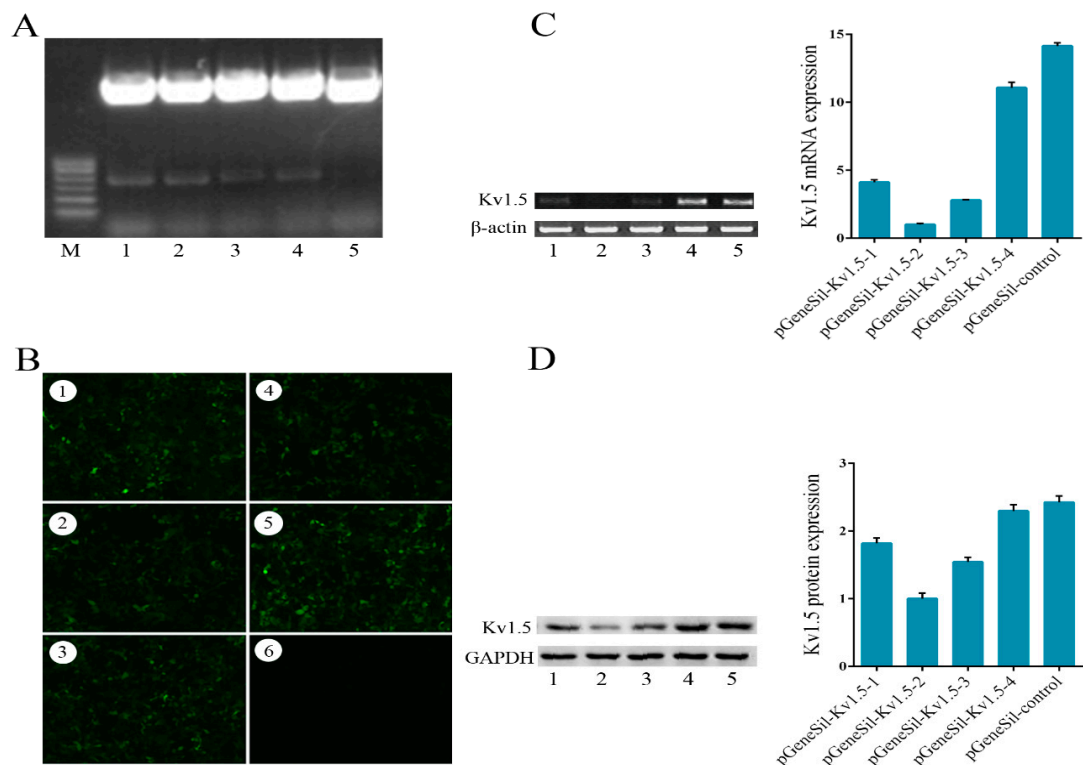
**Figure 1.** Aberrant expression of Kv1.5 in osteosarcoma. (A) RT-PCR was performed to measure Kv1.5 mRNA levels in SH-SY5Y, MG-63 and hFOB 1.19.  $\beta$ -actin was used as the internal standard; (B) Protein expression of Kv1.5 was measured in SH-SY5Y, MG-63, and hFOB 1.19 cells by Western blot analysis. GAPDH was used as the internal standard; (C) Immunohistochemistry staining for Kv1.5 in MG-63 cells. Images were captured using an Olympus light microscope equipped with a CCD color camera; Scale bar = 50  $\mu$ m; (D) Immunohistochemistry of Kv1.5 in human brain, osteosarcoma and osteofibrous dysplasia samples. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; Scale bar = 100  $\mu$ m.

### 2.3. Effects of Kv1.5 Silencing on the Proliferation of Osteosarcoma Cells

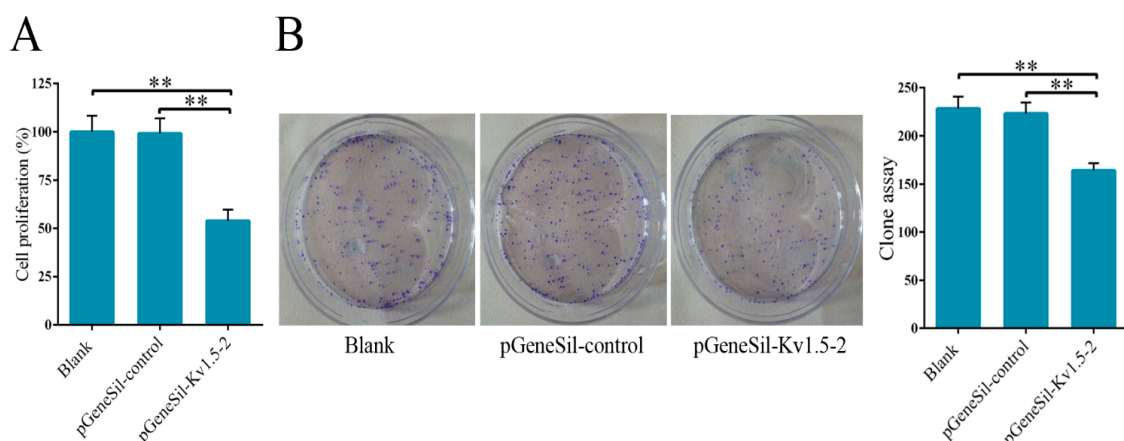
Next, we transfected MG-63 cells with Kv1.5-shRNA (pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2) to knockdown the expression of Kv1.5. We first analyzed the effects of Kv1.5 silencing on the proliferation of osteosarcoma cells using CCK-8 assay and colony formation assay. Compared to control-shRNA (pGeneSil-control) transfected cells or untreated cells (Blank group), Kv1.5-shRNA could significantly inhibit the proliferation of MG-63 cells (Figure 3A,  $p < 0.01$ ). Similar results were obtained from colony formation assay (Figure 3B). These results suggest that Kv1.5 plays critical roles in proliferation of osteosarcoma cells.

### 2.4. Effects of Kv1.5 Silencing on the Cell Cycle of Osteosarcoma Cells

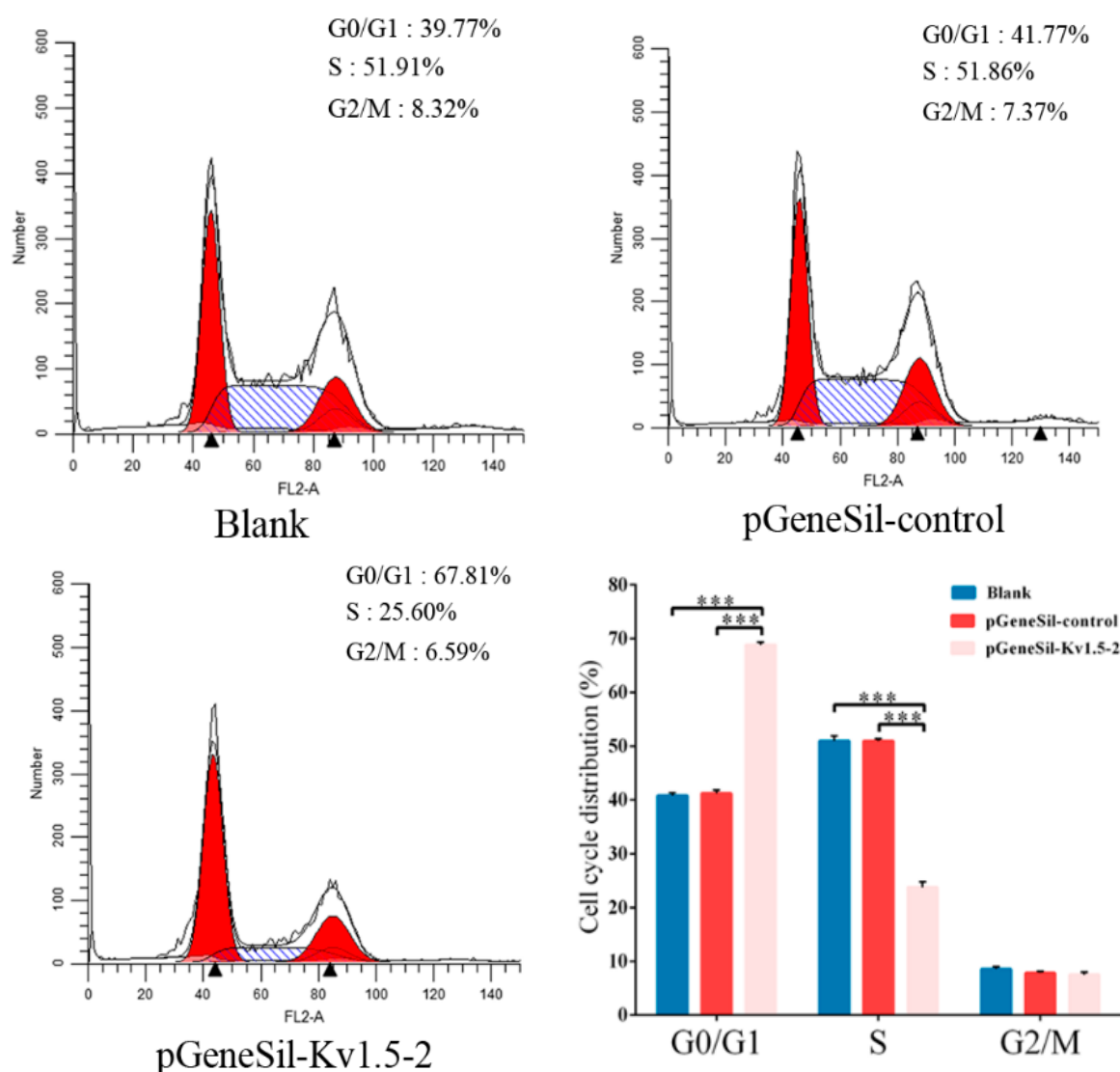
We then explored the effects of Kv1.5 silencing on cell cycle of osteosarcoma cells. Flow cytometry analysis showed that Kv1.5-shRNA transfected MG-63 cells exhibited a significant cell cycle arrest at G0/G1 phase and there was a significant reduction in S phases (Figure 4).



**Figure 2.** Screening, identification, transfection and evaluation of Kv1.5 shRNA. (A) Plasmid DNA was cut by HindIII and SalI. M: DNA marker. 1: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-1; 2: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2; 3: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-3; 4: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-4; 5: pGeneSil-control; (B) The images of MG-63 cells after transient transfection with 1: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-1; 2: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2; 3: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-3; 4: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-4; 5: pGeneSil-control; 6: blank. Original magnification, 20×; (C) Kv1.5 mRNA levels detected by RT-PCR 48 h after transient transfection. 1: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-1; 2: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2; 3: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-3; 4: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-4; 5: pGeneSil-control; (D) Kv1.5 protein levels detected by Western blot analysis 48 h after transient transfection. 1: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-1; 2: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2; 3: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-3; 4: pGeneSil-Kv1.5-4; 5: pGeneSil-control.



**Figure 3.** Knockdown of Kv1.5 reduces proliferation and growth of osteosarcoma cells. (A) The proliferation of MG-63 cells was determined by CCK-8 assay after transfection with Kv1.5-shRNA ( $n = 6$ ); (B) The growth of MG-63 cells was determined by colony formation assay ( $n = 3$ ). \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

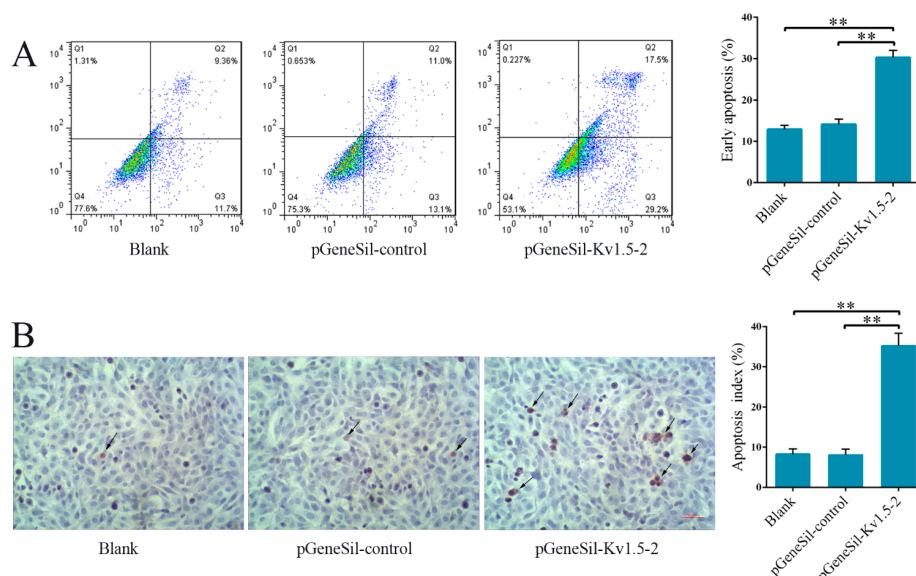


**Figure 4.** The effects of Kv1.5 knockdown on the progression of cell cycle. Cells were transfected with control-shRNA, or Kv1.5-shRNA, or left untreated for 48 h. Kv1.5 silence induced a significant increase in cells arrested in the G0/G1 phase and a decrease in cells arrested in the S phase. Representative images of each group were shown. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## 2.5. Effects of Kv1.5 Silencing on the Apoptosis of Osteosarcoma Cells

We next explored the effects of Kv1.5 silencing on apoptosis of osteosarcoma cells. We examined cell apoptosis using Annexin V and FITC double staining assay. Kv1.5-shRNA transfected MG-63 cells showed a dramatic increase of apoptotic rate compared with control-shRNA transfected cells or untreated cells (Figure 5A). This result was further confirmed by TUNEL assay. As shown in Figure 5B, the cells transfected with Kv1.5-shRNA demonstrated extensive apoptosis ( $35.20\% \pm 5.43\%$ ), compared with cells in control-shRNA ( $8.03\% \pm 2.59\%$ ) or untreated ( $8.22\% \pm 2.29\%$ ) groups. The apoptotic index shows the average percentage of positive cells in six randomly selected visual fields in TUNEL assay.

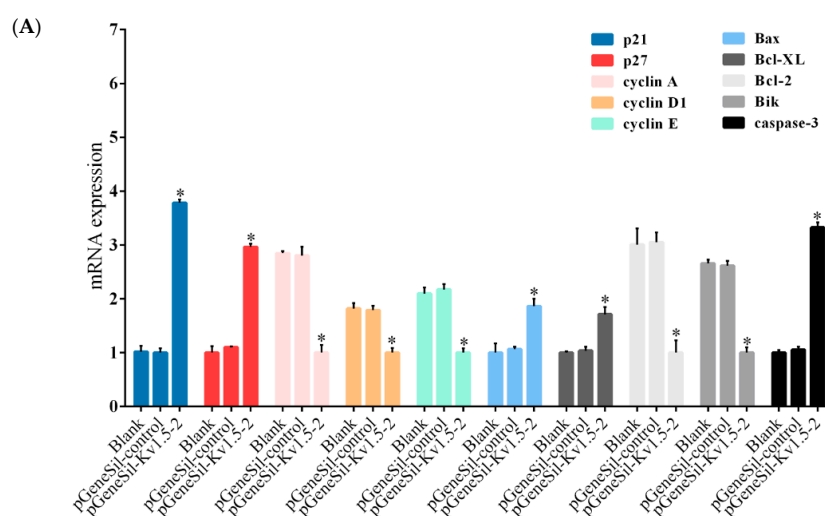




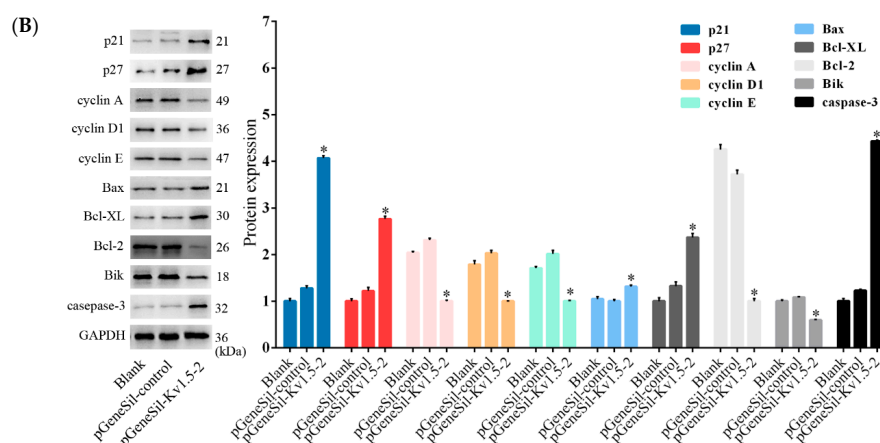
**Figure 5.** The influence of Kv1.5 knockdown on osteosarcoma cell apoptosis. **(A)** MG-63 cells were transfected with Kv1.5-siRNA and then analyzed by flow cytometry. Cells untreated or transfected with control-siRNA served as controls. Cells in the right lower quadrant were annexin-positive, indicating early apoptotic cells ( $n = 3$ ); **(B)** Apoptosis index of MG-63 cells was calculated based on TUNEL assay and represented by the average percentage of TUNEL-positive cells from six randomly selected areas ( $n = 6$ ). The apoptotic cells were indicated by arrows ( $\rightarrow$ ). Original magnification, 100 $\times$ ; scale bar = 50  $\mu$ m. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

## 2.6. Kv1.5 Regulates Cell Cycle and Apoptosis Related Proteins in Osteosarcoma

To explore the underlying mechanism, we analyzed several crucial cell cycle and apoptosis related proteins including p21, p27, cyclins A, cyclins D1, cyclins E, Bax, Bcl-XL, Bcl-2, Bik and caspase-3 using both qRT-PCR and western blot. As shown in Figure 6A,B, the levels of p21, p27, Bax, Bcl-XL and caspase-3 expression were increased while those of cyclins A, cyclins D1, cyclins E, Bcl-2 and Bik expression levels were decreased after transfection with Kv1.5-shRNA, suggesting that Kv1.5 silencing could suppress malignant phenotype of osteosarcoma through multiple signaling pathways.



**Figure 6.** Cont.



**Figure 6.** The expression of several crucial cell cycle and apoptosis related proteins in MG-63 cells after transfection with Kv1.5-shRNA. Representative qRT-PCR (A) and Western blot analysis (B) image showing significant increase of the expression of p21, p27, Bax, Bcl-XL and caspase-3, and significant decrease expression of cyclins A, cyclins D1, cyclins E, Bcl-2 and Bik. All data were normalized as the value obtained for blank group and presented as means  $\pm$  SEM. \*  $p < 0.05$ .

### 3. Discussion

The Kv channel Kv1.5 is a member of the shaker-related (Kv1) K<sup>+</sup> channel family [8] and it is distributed widely throughout the body, including the immune system, skeletal and smooth muscle, the kidneys, and brain [14]. In normal tissues, Kv1.5 is critical for contractility of skeletal muscle fibers, and it is also involved in proliferation and differentiation of myoblast [15]. Kv1.5 contributes to K<sup>+</sup> current by forming heteromultimeric K<sup>+</sup> channels with other Kv- $\alpha$  subunits [16]. A growing pool of evidence has suggested that the Kv1.5 channel is overexpressed in many kinds of human tumors including stomach, pancreatic, and bladder tumors compared to healthy human specimens. However, Kv1.5 expression was decreased in renal adenocarcinoma and unchanged in ovary and lung cancers [8,17].

Up to now, the expression of Kv1.5 and its functional roles in osteosarcoma are still unknown. To address this question, we first analyzed Kv1.5 expression levels in osteosarcoma cells and tissues. The results showed that Kv1.5 has a much higher expression level in osteosarcoma MG-63 cells compared to normal human osteoblastic cell line hFOB 1.19. For studying the behavior of tumor, it is crucial to estimate cell proliferation. Previous studies have shown that several toxins and drugs could specifically block Kv channels and suppress cell proliferation. Compared with non-specific pharmacologic inhibitors, such as tetraethylammonium (TEA) [18] and 4-aminopyridine (4-AP) [18] or new specific pharmacologic inhibitors including S0100176 [19] and diphenyl phosphine oxide-1 (DPO-1) [20], siRNA is a more effective tool to study the function of Kv1.5. According to the sequence of human Kv1.5 mRNA, four shRNAs targeting Kv1.5 were designed and cloned into silencing vectors. Silencing vectors were transfected into cells and the efficiency of Kv1.5 shRNAs transfection was evaluated. These four pGeneSil-Kv1.5 vectors showed different levels of inhibition on Kv1.5 expression, and pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2 vector has the strongest inhibition efficiency, so it was selected for the subsequent experiments. We explored the effects of Kv1.5 silencing on proliferation and growth of osteosarcoma cells using CCK-8 and colony formation assays, and we found that Kv1.5 silencing significantly suppressed cell proliferation and growth after a 48-h treatment compared to the control-shRNA or untreated groups in MG-63 cells.

Cells that fail to proliferate may do so as a result of cell cycle arrest. To determine whether the proliferation and growth defects in Kv1.5 knockdown cells were related to cell cycle arrest, flow cytometry was used to examine cell cycle parameters. Our results indicated that Kv1.5 induced a significant cell arrest at G0/G1 and a reduction in S phase, which is consistent with previous studies

showing the involvement of Kv1.5 in the G0/G1 cell cycle checkpoint [15]. To further explore the mechanism of cell cycle arrest induced by Kv1.5 silencing, we focused on some cyclin-dependent kinase (cdk) inhibitors which may be involved in the regulation of Kv channels [21]. The cdk inhibitors p21 and p27 control the G1/S transition through inhibiting the activities of cyclin A, cyclin D1 or cyclin E [22]. Moreover, it is known that cyclin D1 is the main molecule regulating the progression of G1 phase, cyclin E contributes to G1 to S phase transition, and cyclin A plays critical roles during the S-phase. In Kv1.5 knockdown cells, both the mRNA and protein levels of p21 and p27 were found to be increased dramatically, while those of cyclin D1, cyclin A, and cyclin E were significantly decreased. These results indicated that Kv1.5 silencing induced G0/G1 arrest in osteosarcoma cells through a mechanism involving the up-regulation of cdk inhibitors p21 and p27.

The effect of Kv1.5 on cell apoptosis has been extensively studied but remains controversial. Increasing the expression of Kv1.5 triggered apoptosis in several different kinds of cancer cell lines, including lung, breast, glioblastoma and endometrial cancer cell lines [23]. In contrast, K<sup>+</sup> channel chemical blockers could induce apoptosis in human leukemia cells [24]. To explore the effect of Kv1.5 on osteosarcoma cell apoptosis, we used Annexin V-FITC and TUNEL staining assay to examine cell apoptosis, and qRT-PCR and western blot to measure the expression of apoptosis-related factors. The results of flow cytometry and TUNEL assay experiments showed that Kv1.5 silencing induced apoptosis significantly, in contrast to several results reported previously [23]. We speculate that our results may differ from the previously published results because we are studying a different type of tumor. More importantly, Kv1.5 is down-regulated in the cancer cell lines that have been studied while its expression is increased in the osteosarcoma cells that we used for the present experiments. However, there is little evidence to support these hypotheses and further research is urgently required to prove them.

The Bcl-2 family members consist of anti-apoptotic and pro-apoptotic proteins and play critical roles in regulation of apoptosis [25]. Bcl-2 and Bcl-XL, the anti-apoptotic members, induce the opening of mitochondrial voltage-dependent anion channels to induce apoptosis. The functions of pro-apoptosis members, Bax and Bik are controlled by the mitochondrial pathway of apoptosis through Cyt-c release and caspase-3 activation [26]. Our qRT-PCR and western blot results showed that Kv1.5 silencing significantly increased the mRNA and protein levels of Bax and Bik, while decreased the levels of Bcl-2, Bcl-XL, and Bcl-2/Bax in osteosarcoma cells. The expression level of activated caspase-3 was also found to be increased. Taken together, these results suggest that Kv1.5 could induce osteosarcoma cell apoptosis through regulation of Bcl-2 family proteins.

Finally, to prove the findings described here for MG-63 cells can be generalized, we repeated the cell cycle and apoptosis assays experiments using another osteosarcoma line Saos-2. As shown in Figure S1, similar effects of Kv1.5 silencing on cell cycle and apoptosis were also observed in Saos-2 cells. Although siRNA is a more effective means to study the function of oncogene, downregulation of Kv1.5 channel protein by shRNA is not necessarily equivalent to inhibition of its function by drugs. For this reason, we employed one of the Kv1.5 specific inhibitors DPO-1 [20] to treat MG-63 cells, and we found that DPO-1 (30 nM) induced apoptosis and inhibited proliferation of MG-63 cells (Figure S2A,B). However, previous reports showed that ion permeation is not the only feature of some potassium channels relevant to tumor growth and progression, elimination of ion permeation by drugs did not abolish tumor progression induced by some potassium channels [27]. Thus, we preferred to use siRNA, rather than drugs.

In conclusion, our work demonstrated that Kv1.5 expression is increased in osteosarcoma cells and tissues and shRNA mediated silencing of Kv1.5 results in cell proliferation inhibition, cell cycle arrest, and induces cell apoptosis. Our results suggest that Kv1.5 could be a novel target for osteosarcoma therapy. However, the regulation of Kv1.5 and its effects in cell proliferation, cell cycle, and apoptosis is quite complex and there are still many details that we do not rule out. We could determine the exact mechanism of how Kv1.5 regulated the cdk inhibitors and Bcl-2 family



proteins or other pathways that may also be affected by Kv1.5 inhibition. These will be the topic of our next endeavor.

## 4. Experimental Section

### 4.1. Cell Culture

Human osteosarcoma MG-63 cell line, human neuroblastoma SH-SY5Y cell line and human osteoblastic hFOB 1.19 cell line were purchased from the American type culture of collection. SH-SY5Y and MG-63 cells were cultured in RPMI-1640 medium (Gibco, Rockville, MD, USA) at 37 °C in a humidified atmosphere with 5% CO<sub>2</sub>, and hFOB 1.19 cells were cultured in ham'sF12/Dulbecco's modified Eagle medium (Gibco) without phenol red at 34 °C. All the media were supplemented with 10% fetal bovine serum (FBS), 100 U/mL penicillin and 100 µg/mL streptomycin.

### 4.2. PCR

Total RNA was first isolated from cells using Trizol reagent (Invitrogen, Rockville, MD, USA) and the RNA purity and integrity were examined using 1% (*w/v*) denaturing agarose gel (Sigma, St. Louis, MO, USA). A QuantiTec SYBR Green RT-PCR kit (Qiagen, Valencia, CA, USA) was used in PCR conducted on a Rotor-Gene Real-Time analysis instrument (Qiagen). Each sample contained 100 ng total RNA and 400 nM gene primers in a total volume of 25 µL and was run in duplicate [28]. Sequences of forward and reverse primers were as follows: Kv1.5 forward, 5'-CTA CTT CGA CCC CCT GAG -3'; Kv1.5 reverse, 5'-GCT CGA AGG TGA ACC AGA TG-3'; p21 forward, 5'-TGA GCC GCG ACT GTG ATG-3'; p21 reverse, 5'-GTC TCG GTG ACA AAG TCG AAG TT-3'; p27 forward, 5'-AGG ACA CGC ATT TGG TGG A-3'; p27 reverse, 5'-TAG AAG AAT CGT CGG TTG CAG GT-3'; cyclins D1 forward, 5'-CTC GGT GTC CTA CTT CAA ATG T-3'; cyclins D1 reverse, 5'-TCC TCG CAC TTC TGT TCC T-3'; cyclins A forward, 5'-CGA AGC TTG GCG CCG CAG GTG ATC C-3'; cyclins A reverse, 5'-CAA GTC GAC TAA ATG AAA GGC AGC TCC AG-3'; cyclin E forward, 5'-CGG CTC GCT CCA GGA A-3'; cyclins E reverse, 5'-TCA TCT GGA TCC TGC AAA AAA A-3'; Bax forward, 5'-TTT CTG ACG GCA ACT TCA ACT G-3'; Bax reverse, 5'-GGA GTC TCA CCC ACC ACC CT-3'; Bcl-XL forward, 5'-GAT CCC CAT GGC AGC AGT AAA GCA AG-3'; Bcl-XL reverse: 5'-CCC CAT CCC GGA AGA GTT CAT TCA CT-3'; Bcl-2 forward, 5'-ATT GTG GCC TTC TTT GAG TTC G-3'; Bcl-2 reverse, 5'-CAC CTA CCC AGC CTC CGT TAT-3'; Bik forward, 5'-CGC CAG AGG AGA AAT GTC TG -3'; Bik reverse, 5'- GCT CAC TTG AGC AGC AGG TG-3'; caspase-3 forward, 5'-TTC AGA GGG GAT CGT TGT AGA AGT C-3'; caspase-3 reverse, 5'-CAA GCT TGT CGG CAT ACT GTT TCA G-3'; β-actin forward, 5'-TCC ACC TTC CAG CAG ATG TG-3'; β-actin reverse, 5'-GCA TTT GCG GTG GAC GAT-3'.

### 4.3. Western Blot Analysis

Cells ( $5 \times 10^7$ – $6 \times 10^7$ ) were harvested and lysed in lysis buffer (50 mM Tris-Cl (pH 7.5), 150 mM NaCl, 0.2 mM EDTA, 1 mM PMSF and 1% (*v/v*) Nonidet-P40) on ice for 30 min, followed by a centrifugation at 13,200 rpm for 10 min at 4 °C and the supernatants were then collected. The samples (25 µg protein for each sample) were then subjected to SDS-PAGE (12%) and transferred to nitrocellulose membranes (Bio-Rad, Richmond, CA, USA), blocked with 10% (*w/v*) nonfat milk at room temperature for 1 h, and then incubated with antibodies against Kv1.5 (ab181798, Abcam, Cambridge, MA, USA), p21 (ab109520, Abcam), p27 (ab32034, Abcam), Bax (ab32503, Abcam), Bcl-XL (ab178844, abcam), active caspase-3 (ab2302, Abcam), cyclin A (ab7956, Abcam) cyclin D1 (ab16663, Abcam), cyclin E (ab93161, Abcam), Bcl-2 (ab117115, Abcam), Bik (ab52182, Abcam) and glyceraldehyde 3-phosphate dehydrogenase (GAPDH) (ab181602, Abcam) overnight. After incubation with horseradish peroxidase-conjugated goat anti-rabbit or anti-mouse secondary antibody (Santa Cruz Biotechnology, Santa Cruz, CA, USA), the membranes were developed

with chemiluminescent detection kit (Zhongshan Biotechnology, Beijing, China) and exposed to X-ray films.

#### 4.4. Sample Collection

A total of 29 specimens were acquired from the Affiliated Southeast Hospital of Xiamen University between January 2009 and June 2012. The specimens included 23 osteosarcomas obtained from 20 patients (before administration of neoadjuvant chemotherapy) and six osteosfibrous dysplasias obtained from five patients. All the specimens were collected after obtaining the written informed consent from patients according to the protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Affiliated Southeast Hospital of Xiamen University. The specimens were immediately fixed with formalin after collection, and embedded in paraffin.

#### 4.5. Immunohistochemistry

The samples were firstly baked at 60 °C for 2 h and then they were deparaffinized in xylene (Zhongshan Biotechnology) two changes for 3 min each, hydrated gradually with 100%, 95%, 70%, and 50% ethanol and then rinsed with deionized water for 5 min. After unmasking by heating in a steamer for 1 h in 10 mM sodium citrate buffer, pH 6.0, the slides were blocked with 5% normal goat serum for 30 min, followed by incubation with anti-Kv1.5 antibody (1:500, Abcam) overnight at 4 °C. The slides were then washed and incubated with biotinylated goat anti-rabbit IgG (Abcam) at room temperature for 1 h. Then Avidin biotin complex (ABC) (Zhongshan Biotechnology) and diaminobenzamidine (DAB) (Zhongshan Biotechnology) were used to visualize the tissues on slides. The samples were also counterstained with haematoxylin, followed by confocal microscope (Olympus, Tokyo, Japan) analysis.

#### 4.6. Design and Synthesis of shRNA and PCR Primers

The mRNA sequence of human *Kv1.5* gene was identified in NCBI gene bank (Available online: [http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nuccore/NM\\_002234.3](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/nuccore/NM_002234.3)), and four siRNA targeting sequences were designed using Ambion design software with an unrelated sequence as a negative control (Table 1). A BLAST search was performed with the sequences in NCBI database to guarantee the specificity of the four shRNA sequences. Based on the mRNA sequence of human *Kv1.5* in NCBI GenBank, a pair of short fragment PCR primers were designed and synthesized by Sangon Biotech (Shanghai, China).

**Table 1.** siRNA targeting sequences.

Name	Sequence	Location
Kv1.5-shRNA-1	5'-TATAATGTAGATATCCATG-3'	2127–2145
Kv1.5-shRNA-2	5'-TTTGTTTGGGTATCCCTC-3'	2360–2378
Kv1.5-shRNA-3	5'-TAAAAATAATATTTTCCCC-3'	2472–2490
Kv1.5-shRNA-4	5'-TAAATTATCAGAAGTATTC-3'	2803–2821
Kv1.5-shRNA-control	5'-GACCTCATAAGGCGCATGC-3'	-

#### 4.7. Construction of shRNA Plasmid and Cell Transfection

To construct *Kv1.5*-shRNAs, two corresponding oligodeoxyribonucleotides encoding a shRNA were dissolved in annealing buffer, incubated at 100 °C for 5 min, and gradually cooled to room temperature to anneal. PGenesil-1 was digested with BamH I and Hind III, bluntended with T4 DNA polymerase, and ligated with the annealed oligodeoxyribonucleotides. Then, 5 µL ligation mixtures were transformed to *E. coli* DH5α. The positive kanamycin-resistant clones were selected and expanded, which were named as pGeneSil-Kv1.5-1, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-2, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-3, pGeneSil-Kv1.5-4 and pGeneSil-control, respectively. All the constructed plasmids were further confirmed by DNA sequencing (Sangon Biotech).

The constructed shRNAs were then transfected into cells using Lipofectamine™ 2000 (Invitrogen) according to the manufacturer's protocol, followed by an incubation in serum-free RPMI-1640 medium at 37 °C for 4–6 h, and then the medium was changed to a fresh one containing 10% FBS.

#### 4.8. Cell Proliferation Assay

Cell Counting Assay Kit-8 (CCK-8) (Dojindo Molecular Technologies, Gaithersburg, MD, USA) was used to analyze cell proliferation. In brief,  $1 \times 10^5$  cells were starved for 12 h in serum-free medium and were transduced. 48 h later, cells were harvested, and 10 µL of the CCK-8 solution was added to each well, followed by another one hour incubation. The absorbance (A) was then measured at 450 nm using a spectrophotometer (Bio-Rad).

#### 4.9. Colony Formation Assay

For the colony formation assay, 0.5% agar (Sigma) was added in 60 mm dishes. The treated osteosarcoma cells were mixed with 0.3% soft agar and added on the bottom agar with  $1 \times 10^3$  cells per dish. The cells were incubated for up to 2 weeks. The assay should be stopped when the colonies are clearly visible even without looking under the microscope.

#### 4.10. Flow Cytometry Analysis

The treated cells were collected and washed twice with cold PBS, and the cells were fixed in 70% cold ethanol overnight at 4 °C. A fluorochrome solution containing 50 µg/mL PI, 3.4 mmol/L sodium citration, 20 µg/mL RNase A and 1% Triton X-100 was added and incubated at room temperature for 30 min in the dark. The cell cycle distribution was measured using FACScan flow cytometry (Becton Dickinson, San Jose, CA, USA) and the results were analyzed using Lysis II and Cellfit software (Becton Dickinson).

Cell apoptosis was examined by flow cytometry after staining using an Annexin V-FITC Apoptosis Kit. 48 h after transfection with siRNA, the cells were collected, washed and fixed in 70% cold ethanol overnight at 4 °C. Staining was performed by following the manufacturer's protocol, and analyzed by FACScan flow cytometer (Becton Dickinson). The percentage of early apoptosis was calculated by counting cells positive for annexin V and negative for PI.

#### 4.11. TUNEL Assay

Cell apoptosis was also examined using TUNEL assay. Briefly, cells on coverslips were fixed using 4% paraformaldehyde for 30 min, and permeabilized with 0.1% Tritons X-100 for 2 min on ice. Then the cells were labeled using TUNEL kit (Invitrogen) by following the manufacturer's protocol. The apoptotic index was calculated using the following formula: apoptotic index = (total number of apoptotic cells/total number of cells)  $\times$  100%.

#### 4.12. Statistical Analysis

All the experiments were repeated at least three times, and all the data were presented as mean  $\pm$  standard error of mean (SEM). Statistical significance was determined using student's *t* test or analysis of variance (ANOVA) using the SPSS18.0 program. *p* < 0.05 was considered significant.

**Supplementary Materials:** Supplementary materials can be found at <http://www.mdpi.com/1422-0067/16/11/26002/s1>.

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